

in the outside silence of things

by don gray

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1

the year
my mother wounded
me with light
was before
the war

legend says
she dunked me
in a muddy
georgia river
to keep me from
running away to sea

legend says
she held me
by the right arm
besides achilles
was something in
your heel &
don't belong
in legends

ever since
old enough
i've run toward
the sea
besides
achilles went to war
& the river told
me there was
more light
by the sea

2

nobody told me about this time
full of eat
 & sleep
 motherwarm
 maybe pisspants
 & pukebelly
 o motherwarm
full of visions without dreams
nobody told me

3

jumped off
the garage once
& landed both
ways
on my feet
like a cat
& on my head
like any dumb animal

thought i was
superman or
rocketman maybe
& i guess
everybody wants
to fly sometime
even if your
wings take you
straight down

4

my grandmother
used to kill chickens
wrung their necks
flap & snap
just like that

one day
a headless chicken
chased me around in
a circle around
my granmother & my mother
until i climbed on top
of the woodpile

my mothers laughed
but i lost my shoe
& there was blood on
my pants & the
chicken hit the woodpile
& died
just like that

5

daddy came back from
the war in a hospital

wounded in the leg
all the way down to
his heel where he
didn't walk at first

the hospital was a
white & green place
full of long tunnels
& beds full of strange men

once my mother sent me
to bring daddy back
& make him happy
after the war

but i lost myself
in the green tunnels
& daddy couldn't walk
in the hospital to me
& the white dress woman
lost my mother

& i found myself
walking & crying
among wounded men

used to play
with the big
red velvet ants
under the porch
behind the house
where the ground
stayed moist

when i found
an ant
i dumped
moist dirt on him
& watched him crawl out
& dumped dirt on him
& watched him crawl
& dumped dirt & watched him
& dumped & watched

until one day
he bit me
& the red
velvet pain
shot up my arm
i put moist dirt
on the sting
to draw out the poison
the ant still struggled
under the dirt

daddy
shot a rabbit
over my head
that ran into the
bramblebriars

i was only
sevensmall for
my age

a 12gauge
shotgun
browning & semiautomatic

i heard
boom running
down my dreams
for a week

the rabbit
got away
wounded

8

sin
terrible black ugly
sin in you/

mama
can i go out &
climb the mimosa tree

yes sin
you all have sin
& yes i too have
sin/

mama
can we go up to uncle louie's
& catch june bugs today
now let us all
bow our heads &
pray that we
might receive the light/

mama
can i have a nickle
for a popsicle

the light of our
lord jesus christ/

mama
churches are all
dark inside

9

during
the first year
of beaches

i always tried
to run the
foam line

between the sea
& the land
but i never could

the sea was always
going out or coming in
& the land the other

when
i sat & listened
to the waves land in foam

& the gulls screech the wind
& the crabs scratch the sand
& the wind wave the trees

i ran again
by the sea
in the outside silence of things

10

mother
laughed kisses
on my face
that burned skin
blush in front of friends

i was at least
tenmanly
for my age

avonred
lipstick from
the doortodoor sales

i felt
kisses laughing
down my dreams
for a week

my friends
ran away
laughing

during
 the third year
 of beaches
 i always stayed
 until sundown

the sea .
 remained light
 past the last
 second of the sun
 & the sea
 was filled
 with the blood
 of the day

& then i turn inland
 to the shadows
 of the mangroves
 where the sun never rises
 & the light of the sea
 fails

the day mother died
 i knew it already

because dad left
 after the phone rang

the house wept full
 of georgia relatives

& it was in florida
 the land sick with green

& i went outside to lie in the
 juice of grass cut yesterday

to watch the aphids climb
 each other on nasturtium stems

& smell the sweet acid mold
 of sun rotten oranges

dad came back as i ran
toward the palmetto & mangrove sea

& i stopped & three feet
under the swift sand

felt the green sea surge

13

the second
time i met
my other mother
she played a trick
on me

gave me
a little tin can
that said candy
& i opened
 sprong out
 popped a 5ft snake
a cloth covered spring
green backed rattler or
a diamond backed green snake
anyway everybody laughed
but me

we never met a
second time after that
& i never opened cans again
but later i gave her
a birthday can of rattle snake meat

-- Don Gray

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